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OBEY SUPPORTS FARM PROGRAM RENEWAL

Bill Includes Extension of MILC, Country of Origin Labeling,
Support for Specialty Crops

WASHINGTON, D.C. â€“ Seventh District Congressman Dave Obey (D-WI) said today that he voted for House passage of the new Farm Bill because it treats dairy farmers fairly by extending the MILC price safety net, it requires country of origin labeling for meat and includes important new initiatives for cranberries and other fruits and vegetables.

â€œI have not supported a Farm Bill in many years because the dairy program has usually been stuck in the caboose at the back of the train, treated only as an afterthought when other commodities had been taken care of,â€ Obey said. â€œLast time out, dairy ended up being shorted when the MILC program was slated to expire before all the other commodity programs. That created a huge budget hole - the MILC gap - which meant Senator Kohl and I had to spend more than two years trying to fix the problem just so dairy could be at the table for this bill.â€

“We finally succeeded earlier this year in closing the MILC gap, which enabled Chairman Collin Peterson of Minnesota to extend MILC to the end of this Farm Bill,” Obey added. “Now dairy is riding up front with everyone else.”

The bill also included a number of other improvements over the current program, including an enforceable country of origin labeling provision and important new initiatives for fruit and vegetable growers, Obey said.

“The 2002 Farm Bill had a country of origin labeling requirement but USDA dragged its feet and a hostile congressional leadership blocked implementation. The new Congress has a greater determination to make sure it happens this time. Country of origin labeling lets American consumers who have a preference for American beef, pork and chicken know what they’re getting when they go to the store. It’s a win-win for American farmers and consumers,” he said.

On the new initiatives for fruit and vegetable growers, Obey noted that in the past too much of the Farm Bill benefits were targeted at traditional crops such as corn, wheat, rice and cotton. “This bill, acknowledging changing consumer tastes and demands for more healthy alternatives, represents a significant shift,” he said. “It boosts funding to help states with specialty crop research, marketing, disease management and food safety. That will help central Wisconsin’s cranberry farmers and potato and vegetable growers. There is also additional support for farmers who want to switch to organic production, it promotes fruit and vegetable consumption in domestic nutrition programs, makes specialty crops eligible for export assistance and conservation programs, and aims to make it easier for organic farmers to get crop insurance. The bill also expands farmers markets and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities.”

Obey concluded that the bill was not perfect, “for example, the new payment limitations are an improvement over current law but I feel they should have gone further,” he said, but in the end it deserved his support because “unlike several past farm bills, it did not go out of its way to disadvantage upper Mid-west dairy farmers.”

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